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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SECSTATE VISIT TO THE REGION

Editorial Commentary

-- "Jordan's interests before Rice's priorities"

Columnist Fahd Khitan writes on the inside page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (10/04): "Rice who is touring the region is carrying an agenda that is different at least in terms of the priorities of Washington's interests. She wants the 'moderates axis' with whom she met in Cairo to line up behind the Bush administration in the fight against extremism and forces of extremism in the region. More clearly, Rice wants Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf countries to stand in the face of Hamas and Hizbollah and Syria and Iran in order to pave the way for the conclusive confrontation with Tehran. To do this, Dr. Rice has not problem dispensing to the Arabs a few courtesy remarks about the Palestinian issue and reminding them of Bush's two-state initiative. The calculations and interests of countries considered of the alliance of moderates are different. For Jordan, it will be disastrous if it accepts such a policy or even get involved in its implementation, because it will be the first victim.... The results of Rice's tour in the region can be assessed now, but what is certain is that the alliances of moderates, which has been tricked by Washington so often, seems to be unwilling to take part in a new American adventure in the region on the pretext of fighting extremism before some understanding is reached on the Palestinian issue. This is because the moderate regimes have paid a heavy price out of their own popularity and credibility when it did agree to go along with Washington's destructive policy all these past years. Any Arab regime that is in the least concerned about its future and not necessarily the interests of its people will not run the risk of following a mad administration that wants to start a nuclear war in the region. Jordan is required now to determine its options clearly and not to be dragged into Israeli and American schemes designed to bring the downfall of the Hamas government or besiege Syria and Hizbollah or participate in the anti-Iran issue. This is because all these parties are genuine opposition forces whose role and position must be utilized to snatch the required concessions from Israel."

-- "Rice's priorities"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back-page of centrist, independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (10/04): "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was mistaken to make the Iranian nuclear file the main topic of her current visit to the region. The danger that Iran will constitute to the Middle East if it develops a nuclear weapons cannot be denied ... but the more serious danger that the region

needs to remove is the continuation of the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and its subsequent oppression and injustice. The United States agrees with the moderate Arab countries that the continuation of the status quo and its resulting deformities that threaten the security of the region is impossible. However, this diagnosis has not been translated into a consensus on the priorities. Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have been arguing about the need to focus on the Palestinian issue as being a requirement and a point of entry for addressing all points of tension in the region.... But America, as it does, insists on imposing its own priorities and does not pay due attention to the stances of its friends in the region.... It seems that Rice will leave the region without having launched any new efforts to revitalize the peace process. The only outcome of the Secretary of State's visit will be to weaken even more the forces of moderation."

-- "Rice's mission: the climate of failure"

Chief Editor Taher Odwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (10/03): "Condoleezza Rice's mission seeks to accomplish two things from its tour in the region. The first is revitalizing the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, and the second is confronting Iran with Arab (Sunni) support.... Rice can succeed in revitalizing the peace process if, for instance, she showed concrete support for President Mahmoud Abbas, like ending the Israeli siege, opening the crossing points, or releasing a few thousand prisoners from Israeli jails. But Rice is not going to do any of that.... The other expected failure for Rice's visit is related to the confrontation with Iran.... Neither Jordan, nor Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries are going to be dragged into a confrontation with Iran for America's sake and for the sake of Israel's security. There is sufficient awareness and understanding that the confrontation between Tehran and Washington is based in essence on a struggle of roles and fulfilling their interests at the expense of the Arabs. It is in the national interest of the Arabs to stand against any region or international conflict that targets their land, security and wealth.... Rice is going to fail in building an Arab alliance that would support it against Iran because it is not the Arabs' responsibility to resolve America's problems and get it out of its crisis in Iraq. On the contrary, their responsibility is to put an end to the destructive American policy in the Middle East that has brought nothing but wars, sieges and instigation of sectarianism."

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